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Author(s): Paul Jorion

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Paul Jorion

1. Prologue

In 1954, Kenneth L. Pike wrote a programmatic report on Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour. Therein he described what he saw as two alternative and complementary approaches to culture, the Emic and the Etic approaches. The two neologisms were coined after Phonemic and Phonetic as used in linguistics, and their contrast aimed at evoking a contrast similar to that between them. Accordingly, Emic refers to specific approaches to single cultures, it postulates that cultures are systematically organised and aims at eliciting within one particular culture that system of 'differences which make a difference'. Conversely, Etic refers to general approaches resorting to 'universal' or all-purpose analytical tools. Etic apprehends cultural systems in a comparative perspective; among its tools are the elementary units for emic analysis, associated heuristic principles, and a general catalogue of emic systematics.

Pike's platform was ambitious, and most revealing of the leading role Phonemics were playing in the fifties as a possible model for a 'scientific' anthropology to come. Ten years earlier Levi-Strauss had displayed a comparable juvenile enthusiasm when he wrote:

Phonemics (the English translation erroneously has instead 'structural linguistics') will not fail to play the same renovating role with respect to the sciences of man that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences (1963:33, originally, 1945).

Pike, however, provided very little as a matter of illustration of his ambitious programme, indeed he would have been at pains to do so: his platform was harmonious and seductive, but as commentators were quick to notice, largely unfeasible as far as anthropology was concerned.

The contrast pair which had shown so productive in a sub-field of linguistics met with insuperable difficulties in cultural and social anthropology. The Emic approach relied heavily on the a priori principle that cultures as a whole are systematically organised. Although the postulate of systematic organisation of the phonemics of a language had fruitfully been exploited by Trubetzkoy, Jakobson & Halle, French remarked

that cultures are not necessarily systematic in all their parts: 'all of culture cannot now be handled as a system which can be studied emically' (1963:398). Similarly Jahoda observed that 'any single culture contains (...) many sets of overlapping and interlocking systems at different levels' (1976:58).

Also most anthropologists hold that the conditions of unified Etics have not yet been met. This despite Murdock's confident assumption that 'in anthropology, the initial classificatory task has now been substantially accomplished in the field of social structures' (1955:361). Even in a well-developed sub-field like kinship studies where much ingenuity has been devoted to designing analytical concepts and building catalogues of some sort, many definitional questions remain unsolved and unanimity between experts is not in sight.

Even if the etic concepts were at hand a much more formidable task would remain to be performed: Pike's Emic entails a complex theory of the reciprocal influences of cultural segments onto each other. Bold attempts have been made in this domain since Tylor's seminal, On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions (1889), however theory has hardly progressed beyond 'significant' correlations between odd variables. This question, a variety of the 'many-bodies problem', is still badly in need of a reformulation that would render partial solutions attainable.

II. Emic and Etic in retrospect

Until recently anthropology has not been very self-reflexive. It might have been reasonably expected that women and men who scrutinise the activity of their fellow-human beings as the very object of their research, would have kept a critical eye on their own practice. On the whole this has not been the case, and amazingly so. Actually, it might be a sign of good health: Kuhn's view has become commonplace that scientists develop an interest in their own methodology mainly at times of crisis; when questions fail to seem worth the trouble of answering them and... answers look somewhat unconnected to the questions they are stemming from.

A partial explanation of this lies in the fact that anthropology still owes much of its support to lay-audiences with an interest in the 'exotic' or the 'natural history of the Native American'. Such a support discourages the use of jargon and exaggerated emphasis on methodological debates. Hence anthropology has shown a remarkable capacity for remaining close to everyday language: anthropologists are still discussing 'religion', 'myth', 'magic' or 'belief', words which cannot be regarded as concepts specifically

elaborated by anthropologists (see Leach 1982:131). This may be much less healthy: developing fields produce their own concepts, or at least endow existing words with specific new definitions. The history of physics has chapters devoted to the historical record of such words as 'force', 'mass' or 'acceleration'. Nothing of the kind has happened in anthropology, and when the anthropologist-in-the-street speaks of 'religion' what s/he has in mind is still very much what the lay-person believes this word to mean. I have argued elsewhere that there is some benefit to be gained in doing so. Words like 'magic' or 'belief' refer to a complex social and interactional reality which - should it be uncovered - may question the foundations of anthropological reflection (in a similar vein, see Gellner on 'baraka', 1973:40-43, originally 1962).

Only political issues - in the classical usage of the phrase - have led anthropologists to scrutinise their own behaviour, and in these instances it can hardly be said that debates have much benefited from anthropological insights. It is therefore the more intriguing that the Emic/Etic pair has turned out to be an undisputed success. Although derived from linguistics, the two concepts have been adopted in the anthropological vocabulary and, even more remarkable, they refer restrictively to the behaviour of the anthropologists themselves (I am dealing with cross-cultural psychology below). Although they might not appear that often in print, the successful contrast pair belong undeniably to the workshop, seminars and corridor discussions. The question I would like therefore to elucidate here is why in this particular instance have anthropologists so happily forsaken one of their established traditions: distaste for jargon and lack of interest for their own practice? Let me be clear from the beginning: my purpose is not to reinstall the orthodoxy of Pike's initial Word. On the contrary I intend to focus on the largely unpredictable drift in the forest of symbols of Emic and Etic since they first came to light. The title of my paper indicates my purpose: it mimics Austin's Three Ways of Spilling Ink (1961), a sociological inquest on such words as 'intentional', 'purposeful' and 'deliberate'; accordingly my method is that of linguistic philosophy: how do we use those two words which have grown indispensable; in particular, do we use them in any way compatible with what we hold them to mean? I hope to show that the answer is 'No'.

III First principles

I would like now to start again, as if from scratch, ignoring momentarily Pike's initial contribution, and suggest provisional definitions of Emic and Etic as we are using them in everyday practice; there will be plenty of space below to revise my initial caricatures.

Emic has become, I believe, something like Geertz's 'to see things from the native's point of view' (1974:27). Etic refers to the other type of approach, involving concepts, analyses and explanations, which characterise the anthropologist inasmuch as her/his standpoint differs radically from that of the native.

No doubt part of the success of the pair may be ascribed to the simple fact that it is not in current circumstances dishonourable to claim one is practising either Emic or Etic analysis. Indeed one can easily think of instances where one is clearly preferable to the other. There would be general agreement in thinking that the Emic approach is superior when dealing with mother-child relations, and that the Etic should be preferred in dealing with long-trend market price evaluation. There may even be good grounds for claiming oneself a dedicated practitioner of one of the two in preference to the other. Thus Harris:

In the cultural materialist research strategy, etic analysis is not a stepping-stone to the discovery of emic structures, but to the discovery of etic structures (1979:36)

But let us go more deeply into the details of the respective merits of Emic and Etic as their supporters see them.

Emic as preferable to Etic, refers to a capacity for understanding, a capacity for distancing oneself sufficiently from one's own habitual reference framework to slip into the other's skin, heart and brain and see the world through his eyes. A capacity for sympathy and empathy, for that type of compassion Rousseau regarded as man's distinctive feature, the sentiment of 'pity'. Emic denotes a self-reflexive propensity; the anthropologist adopting the Emic approach transcends the spontaneous ethnocentric naivety of his coarser colleague who, unwittingly, succumbs to the prejudices of the Westerner towards the Other, the 'Savage', the 'Primitive', the 'Less Developed'. The older ethnology was prompt at seeing the world of the other as one of irrationalities and monstrosities. Seen through the native's eye, his own world has regained meaning and coherence, disjointed parts have become elements of an integrated whole, rational enough to ensure its members' physical survival and psychological

comfort. The Etic approach is likely to miss out the 'flesh and blood' of such a reality, drying it out into disembodied models and structures.

Etic as preferable to Emic stresses its commitment to plain facts, its confidence in the objective scientific approach, and its focus on the true reality as opposed to delusions and wishful thinking. The emic analyst got lost somewhere in his romantic daydream. One of the achievements of science and rationality is the all-embracing awareness of man's inclination to self-mystification. Anthropology remains in this sense Tylor's 'reformer science'. The emic analyst does not know where to stop and becomes rapidly as gullible as his object of enquiry. Interesting contributions to poetry should be left to the Poet, and the anthropologist should be content with contributing to anthropology, the natural science of humankind.

Some have said similar things in less emotional terms. Thus Goodenough holds Emic as describing a culture 'in its own terms', while Etic acts as a 'metalanguage' (1970:108-109). Very close also to the Emic-Etic contrast in common parlance is Geertz's dichotomy - borrowed from Kohut - of 'experience-near' and 'experience-distinct':

An experience-near concept is, roughly, one which an individual - a patient, a subject, in our case an informant - might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one which various types of specialists - an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist - employ to forward their scientific, philosophical or practical aims (1974:28).

So much for a brisk portrait of the Emic/Etic pair in everyday action. Although I believe I have not betrayed the anthropologist when s/he resorts to the pair, I should underline, before the reader hastily does so, that this is already quite remote from what Pike originally had in mind.

One aspect of Pike's original intent which was soon lost of sight is that the systematic organisation of the Emic is not necessarily the deliberate outcome of the actor's intention. The system which operates at the emic level may be as fully hidden to the actor as it is to the anthropologist who approaches it for the first time. For example:

in lying (...) we have an illustration of an emic difference, where the natives themselves cannot immediately detect that difference - or it may go permanently undetected by the hearers (1954:13).

The purpose of the actor is but one of the elements which introduce order in the cultural system (ibid:9), sometimes it happens to be the only one (ibid:12), but a culture gets systematically organised by a variety of other factors which may lie beyond the actor's conceptualisation. Thus,

An illustration remote from human behaviour may be helpful: in an emic approach, the analyst might describe the structural functioning of a particular car as a whole, and might include charts showing the parts of the whole car as they function in relation to one another (ibid:10).

This suggestion of studying a car emically, in Pike's original text, emphasises the shift of meaning of the Emic notion in current and common anthropological practice: Emic has been so extensively equated with Geertz's 'seeing things from the native's point of view' (1974:27), that the very suggestion of approaching a car emically is bound to sound bizarre to the anthropologist. But in doing so, Pike was consistent with his own definition of Emic as specific versus Etic as general. Let us have a look at the second part of the passage quoted above: the Etic approach to a car,

in an etic approach he might describe the elements one at a time as they are found in a stock room, where bolts, screws, rims, fenders and complex parts, such as generators and motors from various models, and makes of cars, have been systematically "filed" according to general criteria (ibid:10).

I feel confident that in our current view, both this and the emic approach to a car would be spontaneously regarded by the anthropologist as two varieties of Etic, say the emic as a 'physiological' variety and the etic as an 'anatomical' variety.

The reason for this shift of Emic towards 'from the native's point of view' is however easy to locate: the very fact that with human behaviour, purpose and intention constitute some of the decisive elements which give culture its systematic slant - but, again, in Pike, not the only elements leading to such effect. Insofar as the individual's intentions and purposes are clear to his mind, the ordering principle of culture gets confused with the actor's representation of it; or at least, if no proper conceptualising is assumed, astute questioning can lead to the elicitation of the emic systematisation, i.e. Harris' Emic as 'the native as ultimate judge of the anthropologist's adequacy' (1979:32).

IV. Emic as 'the native as ultimate judge of the anthropologist's adequacy'

When I introduced Emic and Etic at the beginning of the preceding chapter, I hinted at the fact that it might be easier to define briefly Emic than Etic. Indeed, 'through the native's eye' appears as one of Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas', Etic seems much more elusive, due probably to the variety and variable complexity of what we regard as our distinctive approaches. Does this imply however that faced with a series of statements, analyses or explanations and asked to decide which is which we would easily spot the Emic and leave the Etic as somehow residual? I believe that the contrary would actually happen: the Etic is easier to spot, and the Emic would act as a remainder. Statistics, holistic approaches, evolutionary views signal unmistakably the Etic approach. There is little mystery as to why this should be so: these all involve intellectual perspectives which we do not expect the actor will share with the anthropologist. Hence we would not think of turning to him to validate our analysis. No anthropologist has ever seriously contemplated submitting his statistical work for example to 'his' people to obtain confirmation. On the contrary this is what occurs with Emic. In other terms our practice has provided us with good insights as to when to 'elevate the native informant to the status of ultimate judge of the adequacy of our analyses'. It is not that we would sometimes regard his views as irrelevant - it is part of the anthropologist's book of good practice that we never do so - but in some cases the native's opinion is not entered as 'criterion of validity' but as 'normative statement', 'cosmological representation', etc.

There is a possible confusion here however, and some anthropologists fail to spot the pitfall: a native confirmation of the anthropologist's explanation is seldom a 'native explanation'. There are cases when it is the case, if the actor says 'I did so because I had to do so', this counts as an explanation, although a very crude one. More often quoting the informant will not do. The actor's explanation 'for the anthropologist' is necessarily somewhat special as it is deliberately devised so as to enlighten an outsider (see Bourdieu 1972:1106), it would automatically involve some specific conceptualising which can be done without an insider's explanations which take a whole world representation for granted and develop within this particular 'space'. Levy-Bruhl has aptly distinguished the anthropologist's explanation from that of his native informant:

Does 'explaining' really refer to the same operation when we are dealing with ourselves, or with the Andamanese, the Papuan or the Australians? (...) (For us) to explain a fact is (...) to show that it enters preexisting frames, and to show precisely where in these frames it fits. But, as one knows, the primitive mind resorts sparingly to such frames which are so necessary to our minds (...) (For the primitive) to explain is thus (...) to perceive in a mystical manner the intervention of a 'supernature' - invisible but present - in the normal course of experience. Briefly said, from our point of view, causal explanation is to be sought intra naturam while the primitive mind resorts to causes which are extra or supra naturam (1935:175-176).

Leaving aside the 1930s style, I believe we still subscribe to something of the kind. To conclude this point - at the risk of some obscurity - I would say that we feel happy with an actor's Etic opinion on our Emic interpretations, but that we do not allow him to discuss our Etic views, which are only open to discussion by our own peers in the anthropological profession. So when do we turn to the native for corroboration? I believe in two types of occurrences which should be carefully distinguished, if only because some instances have both aspects mixed. First there are those cases mentioned earlier when the informant cannot be concerned with the anthropologist's approach: he ignores 'bird's eye views' of his own society, or, seeing his society as essentially static he is unconcerned at long-trend perspectives. Also mathematical approaches are likely to be foreign to his mind. Secondly there are those cases which Harris characterises as 'mystification': in these the hypothesis developed by the anthropologist accounts - in advance - for why the actor will deny its pertinence. The denial of the informant is among those things that the hypothesis predicts.

I will return to mystification below, but let us elaborate somewhat on those types of approaches which will leave the informant undisturbed. I have no intention of suggesting a complete catalogue of what the anthropologist will spontaneously recognise as Etic, but I need to produce some elements which will serve as evidence in my provocative conclusion.

Harris alludes to our idiosyncratic concerns: 'Frequently etic operations involve the measurement and juxtaposition of activities and events that native informants may find inappropriate or meaningless' (1979:32). 'Juxtaposition' refers to our predilection for the bird's eye view, which may be spatial or temporal. Spatial juxtaposition involves

units larger than those with which the actor is familiar, or putting together units which he would not regard acquainted. Chronological juxtaposition would refer to our concern for the historical explanation, be it a simple concatenation of events causally linked, or grander speculations on historical laws or evolutionary trends.

'Measurement' in the passage from Harris refers - although loosely - to all 'mathematical' approaches. As far as anthropology is concerned, I see them as being essentially of three types: 1. quantitative and statistical, 2. correlational, 3. structural.

1. Quantitative or statistical pertains to the bird's eye view, it is derivative of our interest in collective behaviour, also of our awareness, since Quetelet discovered that the 'Law of Chance' applies to human behaviour, that the holistic approach may reveal trends and patterns which are not apparent in the simple summing of individual behaviour.

2. correlational derives from the observation that although human behaviour does not display actual laws - as are the 'laws' of mechanics - nonetheless some types of events or types of behaviour concur more often than chance would predict, also their occurrence is stable and can be submitted to measurement. Some anthropologists, after Nagel (1961:22) refer to correlational as 'probabilistic' which is an improper usage of the word.

3. structural does not imply any properly so-called 'measurement', it refers rather to an - most often intuitive - awareness of topological and geometrical configurations underlying some aspects of human activities or representations. Such patterns can be uncovered through unsystematic manipulations or, as recent work on kinship reveals, through proper mathematical treatment.

There are no doubt other approaches which the anthropologist would spontaneously acknowledge as being Etic, but the main representatives have been here listed; what I see as their unifying factor I shall say later. Before I leave this subject I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that anthropologists have such an articulate picture in mind when they label some type of approach Etic. But a clear picture is not indispensable to discriminative power: Chomsky's 'performer' is not required to know what when he labels a sentence 'well-formed'. One thing is however certain, the anthropologist sees as Etic, any type of approach which is clearly 'theory-laden'. Furthermore, 'theory-ladenness' is probably most conspicuous when a hypothesis or explanation is specialised and known to be contro-

versial, or at least to be but one of a set of possible alternatives, e.g. a psycho-analytical interpretation of a myth or of a ritual.

Let us return to our second point, 'mystification' which is at the centre of Harris' discussion of the Emic/Etic pair. What makes the anthropologist diffident in this case is the existence of a loop. Part of the mystification hypothesis is always of the following type: 'In such and such circumstances - of which all circumstances when the anthropologist can turn to his informant - the people of X will deny doing this or that for a particular reason which is the actual motivation of their behaviour'. The denial of the informant is built into the system, and he has no access to the 'truth' except by stepping out of the system altogether. By denying the explanation, the informant does not infirm it, he may on the contrary be contributing to its confirmation. We know that Popper is particularly unhappy about such loops and their existence is at the centre of his onslaughts on psycho-analysis (1963:33-37). Commentators before me (Kaplan 1964) have remarked that the hypothesis can be predictive on the particular form the denial will adopt and is therefore not necessarily less 'risky' (Popper 1963:36) than any other. A good example of mystification for our purpose is Moore's explanation of Naskapi divination (1958). Moore says that by resorting to the shoulder-blade oracle before a hunting party, the Naskapi do actually randomise their hunt searches, thereby acting unwittingly so as to conserve their ecological resources. The actor himself is convinced he is optimising his searches, not randomising them. Hypothetically confronted with Moore's explanation, he would either reject it - and the anthropologist would not be surprised or puzzled if he did - or adopt it, and consequently abandon the shoulder-blade oracle for an alternative technique aiming again at optimisation.

In Pike's perspective, Moore's explanation would however be hard to locate: it is definitely not Etic, as it is specific and has no comparative purpose; it is not properly Emic either as it fails to uncover any systematic or systemic organisation, indeed it uncovers 'chaos' instead. What it does do is point to an ecological rationale outside the properly cultural universe of the Naskapi: a 'functional' explanation pertaining to 'social' rather than 'cultural' anthropology. The 'mystification' hypothesis may therefore trespass dramatically the neat framework circumscribed by the Emic/Etic contrast pair.

Another aspect of the mystification issue is the distinction that should be maintained between 'cultural' or 'global' mystification and individual mystification. Moore's example is one of a culture as a whole mystified as to the efficiency and motive of one of its techniques; hence the anthropologist cannot turn validly to his informant for corroboration. In other cases however only subgroups of a cultural entity, or isolated individuals are regarded as mystified as to their own motives - the healing power of psycho-analysis rests on this potentiality - while there exists besides a cultural awareness of such potential individual mystification. Emic analysis in this sense of 'the native as ultimate judge' would then depend ultimately on the apperenance of individual informants to the mystified or to the unmystified. I fear the conclusion becomes then unavoidable that the native can only act as ultimate judge for individualistic interpretations, as it is a general characteristic that the individual remains blind to the holistic significance of his individual actions. It has even been argued that this is for the better as awareness of the 'sociological' effects leads automatically to interference with them, impairing therefore their homeostatic quality. The notion of mystification would thus need to be dramatically expanded, extending to all approaches which imply the 'bird's eye view'.

The response to this undesirable widening of definition would be to reverse the perspective entirely: in adopting a 'radical' cultural relativism the anthropologist would claim on the contrary that no culture is mystified as to itself. In this view, in the absence of extrinsic criteria for social or cultural reality, any particular culture can only be mystified as to the eyes of another - which lacks necessarily the qualification for pronouncing such judgements. It would therefore be in the nature of radical cultural relativism that no Etic statements are made, on account of mystification.

Such summits of scholasticism are rapidly attained when one attempts to unravel all the implications of the 'native informant as ultimate judge'. This suggests strongly that an alternative definition of Emic may prove more productive. I will turn now to a connected definition less concerned with the native informant himself than with the anthropologist mimicking him in a convincing way.

V. Emic as 'a native decision theory'

The point here is no longer of the anthropologist seeking for the agreement of the native on his hypotheses but of the anthropologist acquiring the means for mimicking the native's behaviour. A variety of authors have

advocated a definition of Emic that goes on these lines. Although he avoided the Emic/Etic vocabulary, Frake propounded something of a similar nature:

..an ethnography should be a theory of cultural behaviour in a particular society, the adequacy of which is to be evaluated by the ability of a stranger to the culture (...) to use the ethnography's statements as instructions for appropriately anticipating the scenes of the society (1964:112).

The emphasis is on the predictive power of the theory as far as behaviour is concerned. The same behaviourist emphasis is present in Goodenough's view:

We have not been seriously concerned to understand what one has to know to behave acceptably as a member of an Australian aboriginal tribe any more than zoologists have been seriously concerned, until very recently, to know how to behave acceptably as an ostrich (1970:110-111)

The image is speaking, although somewhat odd. Harris displaces slightly the debate by transcending the purely behavioural level, his view gets close to a 'recipe for going native'.

In carrying out research in the emic mode, the observer attempts to acquire a knowledge of the categories and rules one must know in order to think and act as a native (1979:32).

I believe Harris' definition of 'carrying out research in the emic mode' amounts clearly to elaborating a 'native decision theory'.

An important issue here which has been debated time and again is that of the difference between 'predictability' and 'psychological reality'. Burling's (1964) and Wallace's (1965) famous papers on the psychological reality of componential analysis raised the issue in anthropology, how much does - of in these cases undoubtedly 'etic models - the high predictability model simply mimic or actually reproduce human behaviour. The same issue has become central to Artificial Intelligence: in what precise degree can a computer reproduce rather than mimic human problem solving, when one knows that at the machine level the metal-and-plastic computer operates along principles that differ widely from those of our gelatinous nervous apparatus. Another problem in this respect is that of the actual access of the native to his own decision theory: how much of it is explicit to his mind, how much is implicit and therefore more difficult to elicit. In other words how much of it can he just tell us, and how much need we to supplement his own view. This again is a classical question of anthropology which can be subsumed as the 'norms - strategies' debate. In rough terms, norms tell what the rules are, strategies tell how

the rules are turned in practice. This is also the Malinowskian distinction between 'what they say they do' and 'what they actually do'.

Clearly a native decision theory which would only include the norms would be incomplete. Eliciting the strategies does not raise difficulties as drastic as in the case of mystification, however it is a distinctive feature of strategies that they should remain implicit: tacit and unformulated, if not secret. Of course strategies can be attained through the analysis of behaviour. However in the light of what we have said earlier we cannot avoid to see norms as being on the Emic side, and strategies on the Etic side. This undoubtedly runs counter to Pike's original intent. It is clear that to him, strategies should be accounted for emically: they are essentially what the anthropologist is trying to elucidate. But once again this implies that strategies are organised systematically. The idea is often conveyed by the metaphor of life as a game. Goodenough says explicitly so:

The problem of ethnography is how to describe a culture of another people for an audience that is unfamiliar with it so that the description is not a caricature but presents a set of standards that satisfactorily represent what one needs to know to play the game acceptably by the standards of those who already know how to play it - or if not to play it, understand it and in terms that permit discussing it knowledgeably with them (1970:105).

The last part of the sentence, beginning with 'or if not to play it..' introduces an entirely different notion: that of a common ground between the natives and ourselves, this constitutes the topic of the subsequent section and I will not discuss the idea here. The idea of a game with rules and strategies is on the whole quite satisfactory, but deceptive as it suggests a simplicity that the reality is unlikely to display, except in very restricted sectors of the social life: human beings are always playing a series of different games simultaneously, survival, wealth, prestige, to name a few, and to disintricate the complex reality is far from easy. Explicit attempts at resorting to game theory in anthropology (Buchler & Nutini 1969) have revealed the difficulties involved in taking the metaphor literally. For Pike in any case, both norms and strategies, contributing each in their own way to organise behaviour systematically, should be accounted for emically.

This is not so clearly the case in Harris' approach to Emic and Etic and I believe it is worth while going into the details of his example of

differential care for male and female calves in Kerala. Quite interestingly for my purpose, Harris sophisticates the analyses by distinguishing in both Emic and Etic, a behavioural and a mental component.

The starting point is that in times of food scarcity in Kerala, more male calves starve to death than female. There is a possible biological explanation to this, known to nutritionists: that in mammals, males are more susceptible to starvation than females; but I will ignore this alternative, which is irrelevant to my purpose here. Harris' argument is that, although unwittingly, in times of scarcity Keralan farmers preferentially hand the available food to females, thus precipitating the males' starvation.

Harris lists four propositions which are labelled in the two Emic/Etic and Mental/Behavioural dimensions.

1. Emic/behavioural: 'No calves are starved to death'.
2. Etic/behavioural: 'Male calves are starved to death'.
3. Emic/mental: 'All calves have the right to life'.
4. Etic/mental: 'Let the male calves starve to death when feed is scarce' (Harris 1979:38).

Let us begin with the new dichotomy, the mental versus behavioural dimension. Behavioural in the two propositions where it is used has a sort of statistical dimension attached to it. It refers in general terms to a collective reality. Mental obviously means here normative. The two propositions labelled as mental are phrased in a biblical style which suggests that they are moral precepts rather than pragmatic decision rules. Emic and etic differ widely; the nature of the etic statements suggests they reflect not simply the anthropologist's view but the actual reality. The fact that the emic presents a different view implies it constitutes something else, i.e. a social or cultural 'construction of reality'. What requires explanation is the discrepancy between the actual and the constructed reality.

Within each of the Emic and the Etic, the behavioural is connected to the mental in a similar way: the behavioural describes the state of affairs that results - in the absence of external interferences, such as male calves' metabolic defects - if the mental is strictly observed.

Strict observance of 'all calves have the right to life' should result empirically in 'No calves are starved to death'. Similarly, 'Let the male calves starve to death when feed is scarce' would result in 'Male calves are starved to death'.

Trying to define with increased precision - a flow chart, for instance - the complete mechanism between a moral precept and a state of the world would certainly be very arduous. It is less so if 'actional' black-boxes are retained: intentions - whatever they are - turning unproblematically into decisions - whatever they are - which themselves materialise in actions. The difficulty with black-boxes is that they are culture-specifically generated, hence to assume that members of other cultures necessarily share them with ourselves can hardly fail to be ethnocentric naivety.

Harris' is probably one of those examples where the Etic exposes mystification on a grand scale. But why subdivide Emic and Etic in mental and behavioural? My interpretation is that Harris was aware of some overlap between Emic/Etic and Normative/Strategic (here subsumed under mental/behavioural) but could not decide how exactly they overlapped and therefore subdivided Emic/Etic into mental/behavioural.

I have already dealt with the economy of mental versus behavioural, but how are the four propositions connected to each other? I believe there is no alternative to adopting a genetic approach, i.e. how did Harris produce these four propositions? I assume his starting point was the incompatibility between two data, one being an observation of the anthropologist, 'under poor feed male calves starve to death', the second being a statement of the native, 'all calves have the right to life'. Now I have detailed earlier how mental is connected to behavioural: strictly observed, the mental would result in the behavioural. Thus Emic/mental 'All calves have the right to life' should result in Emic/behavioural 'No calves are starved to death'. But in actuality, Etic/behavioural 'Male calves (happen to) starve to death'; so, how come? I believe the structure of the four propositions is thereby revealed: the three first (Emic/mental, Emic/behavioural, Etic/behavioural) constitute a riddle and the fourth should be the solution. Here it is, Etic/mental 'Let the male calves starve to death when feed is scarce'. What does it mean?

It means that the observable state of affairs does not obtain when the norm 'All calves have the right to life' is observed, but an alternative one: 'Let the male calves starve to death when feed is scarce'. Does it mean that the native lies, or that he is mystified to his own motives to such an extent that he follows an alternative rule unwittingly, or unconsciously - whatever it may mean in this particular instance? I believe that 'Let the male calves starve to death' is simply the strategy that lurks behind the norm: the Etic/mental is the strategy as opposed to the

Emic/mental which is the norm. (I would like to underline again that although the rationale of the Kerala male calves affair is to me probably nutritional, I have ignored what I regard as the likely explanation to elucidate Harris' procedure).

Let me sum up this point. Having been successively disenchanted at Emic as 'through the native's eye', then at Emic as 'the native as the ultimate judge', I turned to Emic as 'the categories and rules one must know in order to think and act as a native' (Harris 1979:32). This amounted to, as I saw it, a 'native decision theory'. Such a theory I decided should not be composed only of explicit norms but should comprehend as well implicit strategies. Emic as Pike has implied should encompass both norms and strategies.

Having however analysed Harris' example of the Kerala calves, I end up with an incompatible result: to Harris norms and strategies belong to the 'mental', the former being the Emic side of it, and the Strategies, the Etic. Or in other terms, I start with a definition of Emic and end up with one of Mental. Where did the flaw get into the system?

The flaw creeps in as the various definitions of Emic I have considered so far are not consistent with each other. I think I have just made the point that 'the categories and rules one must know in order to think and act as a native' are not necessarily elicited by taking 'the native informant as ultimate judge of the adequacy of the observer': the native informant does not possess in his hands all the cards that the anthropologist requires to be able to mimic convincingly his thinking and behaviour. Also, and this takes us back to our first provisional definition, 'seeing the world through the native's eye', is only part of what the anthropologist is after. Understanding the Other, and this we should have surmised from our own personal experience, amounts to much more than 'seeing the world through his eyes'; understanding him is also accounting for what we see as in need of explanation, the differences between him and ourselves. Explanation will never be anything else, reducing the problematic, the unfamiliar to the unproblematic, the familiar. Gellner has very aptly emphasised one way the anthropologist cherishes of achieving such ends: injecting contextual information until the once problematic makes commonsensical sense (1973:27-31).

VI. Emic as 'common ground between Us and Them

Can therefore nothing be salvaged from our earlier attempts at definition? I believe there is one element which shows itself resilient, the idea that appeared in a passage of Goodenough, that of a possible common ground between the anthropologist and the people who are his object of enquiry.

Let us return to that quotation, this time my emphasis is not on the 'game theory' aspect, but on something different; the underlining is mine:

'The problem of ethnography is how to describe a culture of another people for an audience that is unfamiliar with it so that the description is not a caricature but presents a set of standards that satisfactorily represent what one needs to know to play the game acceptably by the standards of those who already know how to play it - or if not to play it, to understand it as well as those who know how to play it understand it and in terms that permit discussing it knowledgeably with them (1970:105).

The idea here is unmistakably that of crossing barriers and building up a representation that would be common to the inquiring subject and the inquired about objects (subjects), in such a degree that a common debate could ensue. The idea of sharing is emphasised in a further passage of Goodenough where Emic appears forcefully as the intersection (in terms of set theory) of Our understandings and Theirs:

When we speak of the emic aspect of ethnography, (...) we want to know how an ethnographer can come to share a set of understandings with the people he studies and how he can in turn share these same understandings with the audience for whom he writes an ethnographic report (1970:112).

Here intervenes a limitation of the native 'as ultimate judge' we have not considered so far: his opinion is of some use to us under two conditions: it must first make sense to us as anthropologists, and secondly we must be able to think of a manner to convey his view to our potential reader. Our own experience as anthropologists has told us that the first condition can sometimes be met while the second cannot: we have become able to think and behave as the native does without being any better than he is at conceptualising our accurate insights.

Furthermore the account for 'the audience for whom the anthropologist writes' must be culture-specific (Emic) and not technical (non-Emic), which imposes further constraints. Therefore, as we have noticed time and again, the practical requisites of the Emic approach are that it is informative, i.e. tells us something about the native's culture,

comprehensible, i.e. tells us something about the native's culture. I believe the conclusion is inescapable: the Emic approach is our common-sensical version of the native's cosmology. And if we are prepared to follow Horton when he suggests (1967:155 ff) that the absence of alternative world pictures characterises traditional thought, we might as well say that the anthropologist's Emic approach is the intersection between 'his' natives' commonsense and that of 'his' readers.

This accounts for some of the more puzzling features of anthropology: the fact I noticed in the very beginning that anthropologists have developed very few new conceptual tools, also that we have learnt so little from our contacts with extremely different cultures. I have always been intrigued by the fact that although colleagues tell you incredible stories of what they have seen in the field, walking on burning coals, voyages beyond death, etc. the account of such facts never appears in print. An obvious explanation to this would be fear of ridicule, but this is somewhat short. A more likely reason is the one we have just uncovered: that the anthropologist can only tell his audience what this audience is capable of hearing. The depressing consequence which I think we should confront with a brave face, is that the Emic approach is always largely determined by the a priori and culturally built western image of the people we are talking about. Although we might be tempted to reject this conclusion as unsound, I am certain that confronted in the near future with a rising Islamic anthropology, we will discover to our own amazement how true this conclusion actually is.

But in the same way as Levi-Strauss told us about his deciphering of Amerindian myths, 'it is in the last resort immaterial whether (...) the thought processes of the South American Indians take shape through the medium of my thought, or whether mine take place through the medium of theirs' (1964:21), we might say, 'never mind', if it does not tell us anything about them it does indeed tell something about ourselves. There is after all a cognitive unity of the human species, the famous 'psychic unity of mankind', and the important issue is to know more about it. Let us indeed think again of this possible meaning of Emic as 'common ground between Us and Them'. It postulates necessarily that there is such a common ground, that the intersection between their world picture and ours is not empty, i.e. that some universals of culture will always crop up right there. This is a postulate, not anything that was

demonstrated since Bastian borrowed the idea from von Humboldt. It might be an over-optimistic view as the works of Levy-Bruhl suggest, and as the remarkable resistance to analysis of the totemic question may well prove. Horton has recently suggested that what is likely to be found at the intersection of cultures is a Berkeleyan 'material-object language' (Horton 1979). He is referring to that part of language, instrumental as to everyday life, which is 'imposed' (strongly suggested?) by the world as it stands, and which exists in its own right quite independently from further elaborations we can construct having the 'material-object language as a basis'. Strawson had propounded similar views:

There is a massive central core of human thinking which has no history (...) there are categories and concepts which, in their most fundamental character change not at all (...) They are commonplaces of the least refined thinking; and are yet the indispensable core of the conceptual equipment of the most sophisticated human beings' (1959:10).

This does not look too bad on paper, but I fear that it will meet with less enthusiasm among anthropologists than it might do among philosophers. Even moderate acquaintance with the 'totemic debate' provides one with massive counter-evidence. Wittgenstein entertained somewhat similar views. In his Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough, he noted, '... their knowledge of nature, should they write it down, would not be fundamentally different from ours. Only their magic differs' (1967:245). What he means is that there is only one way for going about the world instrumentally, but there are alternative explanatory systems; the current debate on the relationship between science and technology makes a similar point: science follows the path opened up by technology - at the risk of 'bifurcating' explanations - while the 'media' image is that of all technology being applied science. It is however difficult to imagine there is a clear boundary between Wittgenstein's 'knowledge of nature' and 'magic' (see Jorion & Delbos 1980). Austin said,

the question about how evidence-language ('idea'-language) is related to material-object-language (...) is a question that has no answer, it's a quite unreal question. The main thing is not to get bamboozled into asking it at all (1962: 142).

I will return to these points below when dealing with commonsense. Having gone so far I will test this new definition of Emic as the intersection of two world pictures on two instances: from Emic to Etic, and from Etic to

Emic.

a. From Emic to Etic

Can Emic as intersection of our and their commonsense withstand the following passage from Pike:

the first approximation in etic terms is then refined as a second etic approximation of the emic system, etc., until he arrives at an emic analysis (1954:9).

Or, in Harris' words,

Observers necessarily begin their analysis of social life with etic categories, but the whole thrust of their analytical task ought to be the replacement of such categories with the emic units that constitute structured systems within the minds of the social actors (1979:35).

Clearly the emphasis here is one I mentioned in the beginning: Emic as open and sophisticated versus Etic as ethnocentric and naive. Etic, when used as a first approach tool, essentially for sorting out material, is bound to be crude: it is a skeleton of reality which is handled and the extent of simplification will rapidly show as the analysis progresses.

In this instance the etic approach is prestructural in that it is used specifically as a first approximation toward reaching an analysis of the emic structure of that language or cultural system (1954:9).

Little by little however, material which was first discarded so as not to encumber the model needs to be reintroduced; among it stands prominently the actor's own representation of his deeds.

The decision not to start with the native's view is, as our discussion of mystification revealed, in many cases justified. Paradoxically the converse is also true, if the actor's representation were a pure reflection of a 'hard' reality there would neither be any urgency for putting it into the picture. But the paradox vanishes once one realises that the representation is hardly ever a pure portrait of reality: the representation contributes to mould the hard reality and this is why it cannot be kept outside the picture. In other words, the sense of emergency the anthropologist feels originates in his conscience that there is a massive ideological or superstructural determination of cultural and social reality.

This is not likely to please either Harris or the French marxists whom he rightly regards as much closer to his views than they would think (1979:217). I have defended elsewhere (Verdon & Jorion 1981) a hypothesis of this sort where the infrastructure gets determined by the superstructure: in that particular paper I held the view that to understand some aspects of Australian Aboriginal life it might be more helpful to regard kinship

as determining demography which in its turn determines the economy, than to hold the opposite view propounded by both Godelier (1975) and Harris (1979:83-85). Thus the fact that the analysis seems to progress from Etic to Emic may be in some cases a rather superficial appearance. What is actually happening is that more elements get integrated in the picture. Some of these are the views of the actors themselves and insofar as they contribute to moulding the social reality, one imagines somewhat deceptively that one is getting closer to the native's point of view.

I believe we have struck here an altogether different dimension: that of the ideological determination of reality - which Harris seems to confuse with 'idealism' (1979:145) - it leaves my current definition of Emic as intersection of commonsenses intact.

b. From Etic to Emic

I accounted above for the move from Etic to Emic. Other authors have mentioned a move in the opposite direction. For example Goodenough when he writes that

emic description requires etics, and by trying to do emic descriptions we add to our etic conceptual resources for subsequent description (1970:112).

Contrary to Pike in the example of a. Goodenough does not refer here to how the analysis of a particular case evolves, but he is speaking of the long run, when the treatment of a particular case can benefit from others carried out previously. Goodenough says that emic description constitutes a useful exercise, in practising it we can test our analytical tools and possibly improve on them or even devise new ones.

How do such things happen: how does an emic notion become an etic concept? We know of such cases in the literature: in the process of explaining a foreign culture the anthropologist gets stuck on a native word like totem, tabu, mana, kwoth, etc. which he does not manage to translate into his own language in any satisfactory way. For economical purposes and after a long paraphrase, he decides his reader now knows what the notion means, and he begins using it systematically, without further paraphrasing. If the notion catches on, i.e. is adopted by other authors and applied to a different cultural reality, I assume one is allowed to say that the notion has moved from Emic to the status of Etic concept.

But now my definition of intersection of commonsenses is running into real trouble and we are at risk of getting into circular arguments.

Let us choose one of those notions as an example, 'mana' for instance. It is by origin a pure emic notion that we retain as a systematising principle at work in one particular culture, the anthropologists resort to it for the definite purpose of 'seeing things through the native's eye'. What is happening in actuality is that the native's point of view is in this instance so foreign to our minds that we have failed to translate his concept and have decided to keep it as it stands. One thing we cannot do at this stage is claim that the notion belongs to the intersection of theirs and ours commonsenses. In fact it was so foreign to our own commonsense that we were forced to adopt it as a borrowing from elsewhere and introduce it in our technical vocabulary. If the anthropologist decides to apply our new concept to other material, e.g. if he attempts to account for the potlatch in terms of 'mana', he indisputably uses it as an etic notion in Pike's sense.

But will it remain Etic? Strangely enough - although it is similar to metaphors 'wearing out' - if the notion really catches on, it will soon cease to appear properly technical and will get swallowed up in our commonsense views. Think of two which have been success stories, 'totem' and 'tabu'. Both are no longer technical words of the anthropologist's vocabulary. Through increasing familiarity they have become part of everyday language. Interestingly, an anthropological explanation of some exotic practice in terms of 'totems' and 'tabus' will be regarded as Emic not because it resorts to native notions but because it avoids jargon and appeals to the plain commonsense of the lay audience. In this case we feel doubly assured that we are not betraying the native's point of view: we only use commonsensical notions, and these were suggested to us in the first place by himself; two guarantees that what we say is congenial to his mind. A notion like 'tabu' has therefore covered a full circle: from Emic to Etic, then back to Emic. But here we are deceiving ourselves as the first Emic is not the same as the second: the first is 'from the native's point of view' - whether we understand it or not, the second is 'plain' to the audience for whom the anthropologist writes. In some way the former is the intersection of commonsenses as seen by the native - or rather as we imagine him to see it - the latter seen from the standpoint of the culture that commissioned us to write about the Other.

I believe we have struck something new and important here: the Emic/Etic dichotomy may cover at least two types of contrast, the first we

have analysed at the beginning of the paper, acceptable to the native informant/unacceptable to the native informant; the second emerged somewhere in the middle of the paper and has become since inescapable: commonsensical to the anthropologist/technical to the anthropologist. The crux of the matter is that 'it all happens as if we thought that the two overlap neatly, and the difficulties probably arise because they do not overlap that much.

VII. Emic as 'non-technical to the anthropologist'

It is self-evident that what the anthropologist sees as the technical part of his job is not what the informant would readily accept; I have discussed this point earlier when characterising the Etic approach. But the reverse assumption, i.e. that the native informant will gladly accept the non-technical considerations of the anthropologist is much more dubious. Although we do not realise we are making this jump, it is a daring jump indeed and I suspect the origin of the successful story of the Emic/Etic contrast pair. It amounts to saying, 'As long as we don't use jargon we're on the safe side, the native informant will be able to understand our hypotheses and tell us whether we are right or wrong'. If on the contrary we turn to theoretical scaffolding, the contact will be lost. Geertz is suggesting precisely this when he writes:

There are a number of ways to escape (the incompleteness of cultural analysis) - turning culture into folklore and collecting it, turning it into traits and counting it, turning it into structures and toying with it. But they are escapes (1973:29).

This is as if our actional model of explanation (intention, decision, action), because we take it for granted, should be automatically more familiar to the native informant than our recourse to algebra. As it does without saying for us, so it should go without saying for them is our motto. The fact that we are at terrible pains to understand what Kepler had in mind when writing Harmonice Mundi some three hundred and sixty years ago, does not deter us from assuming there is a wide overlap between what we may say - non-technically - about the Australian Aborigine and what he may think of himself. Let us remind ourselves once again of what Strawson said about 'a massive central core of human thinking which has no history' (see above), I think Hollis is justified in commenting uncharitably:

It is an indispensable merit of the Strawsonian view that the anthropologist can tackle other cultures armed with truths which he knows in advance that he will find embodied in the scheme he seeks to understand. Without concealed a priori postulates he could produce and justify no interpretations at all. Any fieldwork is thus bound to confirm the epistemological unity of mankind (1979:230).

I will therefore put forward a final definition of Emic as 'non-technical or commonsensical to the anthropologist' and put it to the test.

Harris writes,

..descriptions of mental life based on etic operations do not necessarily uncover the purposes, goals, motivations, and so forth that an emic approach can uncover (1979:42).

I believe we are well-equipped now to see why this should be so. 'Goals', 'purposes' and 'motivations' are notions that we have become so familiar with that we cannot even remember the theoretical or semi-theoretical status they once had. They belong now to the commonsense of the anthropologist -and of all educated and semi-educated persons. We spontaneously expect the native informant to be happy in using such words, or at least in using similar notions. I have said earlier why I am less than convinced that he would be. I quoted Levy-Bruhl earlier on the difference between us and the native informant as far as valid explanations are concerned. Levy-Bruhl's point is even more pervasive: no Australian Aborigine would be prepared to discuss his behaviour in terms of purposes, goals and motivations (discussions about the 'primitive mind' have been marred by the use as counter-examples of African material borrowed sometimes from state-organised societies, Levy-Bruhl was adamant that he only had the Australian and the Papuan in mind - 1935:215). As if the fact that the history of these words has fallen into oblivion had made them ipso facto universal. Duhem drew our attention to how old theories and the development of new ones deposit layers of acquired knowledge on what we keep regarding as immutable commonsense (2d ed. 1914:397). Instead we brandish our ignorance of long-trend evolution of commonsense representations as proof of anthropological ability. G. Elliot-Smith had noticed this tendency in our studies:

In the course of long ages, the originally simple connotation of the words used to denote many of our ideas has become enormously enriched with a meaning which in some degree reflects the chequered history of the expression of human aspirations. Many writers who in discussing ancient peoples make use of such terms, for example, as 'soul', 'religion', and 'gods', without stripping them of the accretions of complex symbolism that have collected around them within more recent times, become involved in difficulty and misunderstanding (1919:7).

It is Levy-Bruhl's merit to have reminded us that the common ground between our sophisticated and rapidly evolving commonsense and that of other cultures who had a less eventful history, should be carefully mapped and not a priori postulated.

VII Conclusion

Discussing the Emic/Etic contrast as used by anthropologists, I hope to have shown in particular that we are deluding ourselves when we label as 'the native's point of view' a type of approach which amounts more readily to 'what our commonsensical usage of everyday language allows him to be'. This should draw our attention to the fact that the old motto 'that we study the others in order to better understand ourselves' may have been all the time closer at hand than we might have thought. That we failed to see this derives partially from our obsession with the native informant's opinion on what we say about him. Of course he rightly remains the warrant for what we say about him as far as accuracy is concerned, also we have all enjoyed this feeling of exhilaration when we get his agreement on our elicitation of some of the principles implicit in his culture, when for instance we uncover the strategies behind the stated norms and he would admit, 'yes, you've really got it'.

Sympathy, craving for identification is what leads us to him or her, but I believe we would delude ourselves if we would think it remains the motive of our reflection afterwards. We seem not to have overcome yet those guilt-feelings which cropped up rightfully when we were made to realise to what ends people may go in what they believe is genuine pursuit of knowledge about humankind. Therefore we are all too ready to believe anyone who suggests that mathematical approaches of kinship share in some way the nature of concentration camp number tatooing: don't they both identify people with numbers?

Plenty of ghosts haunt our anthropological nights, and it is good that they sometimes keep us awake. Nevertheless the time has come when we should be able to do our own sorting-out instead of advocating hastily obscurantism so as to be sure to avoid all possible wrong. This is why I see Harris' onslaught on all forms of obscurantism in anthropology as essentially sound. Of course we must remember that 'science' will never provide us with cues to ethical decisions and that these should be made first, lest they come too late. Whatever we feel about the responsibilities

of the culture which is ours, in the past and unfortunately also in the present, I think that its greedy questioning of the world around it is one of its features of which it can be rightly proud.

Whether they are highly successful at it or less so, Cultural and Social anthropology have developed methods for the understanding of other peoples. Some of these methods are now sophisticated; that not everyone understands them is no sin, to some extent it is a guarantee that they were developed in a definite perspective and to deal with specific problems.

In principle anthropology covers the empirical knowledge of man in its entire diversity. As soon as we go into the details of a particular issue in our domain, we turn to specialised methods and their specific vocabulary. Lamenting about 'babelization' will get us nowhere as in our culture this is indeed how refined empirical knowledge is attained. Because of the object of our enquiries and reflections, it is more essential in anthropology than in any other domain of scientific pursuit that we do not lose track of the achievements of colleagues in other sub-fields. Talking to them of our own intellectual specialities and of theirs, we resort to the common culture of anthropology: we use its lingua franca. To refer to this lingua franca in its own right, we have coined a word, the word 'Emic', to refer to the specialised languages we have coined the word 'Etic'. I can see no reason why we should stop doing so.

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